

EDWARD HOPPER

THE ART AND THE ARTIST



Cover: *Early Sunday Morning*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 35 x 60 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. 31.426

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This retrospective exhibition celebrates both the 50th Anniversary of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the sixtieth anniversary of Hopper's first one-man show, held at the Whitney Studio Club, the Museum's predecessor. The decision by Hopper and his wife, Jo Nivison Hopper, to bequeath their artistic estate to the Whitney Museum is a measure of their appreciation for the early and sustained support his work received from the Museum.

Today Edward Hopper (1882–1967) is well known as the major realist painter of twentieth-century America. Yet his work is also admired by proponents of abstract art, who acclaim his composition, his forms, and his light (Fig. 1). The recognition of Hopper's achievements, however, came only after years of struggle. He was forty-two when he finally had a one-man show in a commercial gallery, in 1924. This exhibition of watercolors was a critical success and all the works were sold, enabling Hopper to cease working as an illustrator and devote himself entirely to painting.

In his student days at the New York School of Art (1900–1906), Hopper commuted daily to New York City from his hometown of Nyack, to study painting with William Merritt Chase, Robert Henri, and Kenneth Hayes Miller. Eventually, Hopper wanted to travel to Europe to see the works of the great masters firsthand. He left for Paris in October 1906 and remained in Europe until the following August. He was immediately captivated by the infinite charms of Paris. By the spring of 1907, he had begun to respond



Fig. 1. *Self-Portrait*, 1925–30. Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.1165



Fig. 2. *Soir Bleu*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 36 x 72 inches.
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.1208

to the city's famous light: painting and sketching out-of-doors, he emulated the French Impressionists.

Hopper returned to Paris on two subsequent trips to Europe during 1909 and 1910. Although he never again visited Europe, his memories remained vivid and the experience had a significant impact on his later development. Years later he admitted, "It seemed awfully crude and raw here when I got back. It took me ten years to get over Europe." As a result of his search for a personal artistic identity, the period which followed his last trip to Europe was one of stylistic experimentation.

Hopper's work was first singled out by the critics for discussion when he participated in a group show at the MacDowell Club of New York in February 1915. The two paintings he exhibited were the monumental *Soir Bleu* of about 1914, and a much smaller canvas, *New York Corner* (*Corner*



Fig. 3. *New York Corner (Corner Saloon)*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund.

Saloon) of 1913 (Figs. 2, 3). Critics dismissed *Soir Bleu*, with its French theme and influences, as only an “ambitious fantasy,” while praising the small *New York Corner* as “a perfect visualization of New York atmosphere.”

Although Hopper would eventually respond to the critics’ growing na-



Fig. 4. *Automat*, 1927.
Oil on canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ x
36 inches. Des Moines
Art Center, Iowa;
James D. Edmundson
Fund, 1958.

tionalism and turn to more typically American subject matter, he created in *Soir Bleu* a scene that is conceptually his own. None of the figures looks at any other; each one is aloof, lost in a world of private thoughts, just as in the pictures of Hopper's maturity. In *Automat* of 1927 (Fig. 4), for example, he presented a solitary female seated at a round table at the same angle as the clown in *Soir Bleu*. Moreover, Hopper has endowed both this figure and the clown with his own introspective nature.

Throughout his career, Hopper developed his early interest in architec-



Fig. 5. *Cobb's Barns, South Truro*, c. 1931. Oil on canvas, 34 x 50 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.1207

ture and cityscapes. He was drawn to cities, not only for their architecture but also for their interior life—the kind of scenes he observed through windows, in restaurants, offices, and apartments. Hopper's most famous cityscape is undoubtedly *Early Sunday Morning* of 1930, which he originally titled *Seventh Avenue Shops* (cover). He later pointed out: "It wasn't necessarily Sunday. That word was tacked on later by someone else." That "someone else" was obviously impressed by the uncanny silence of this painting. Hopper had used a similar horizontal format, with the structures parallel to the picture plane, in earlier works—*East River* of about 1920–23 and *Railroad Sunset* of 1929. In *Early Sunday Morning*, however, the sense of immediacy is achieved through the placement of the buildings close to the picture plane. The shadows cast by the buildings are effectively conveyed, leading the viewer out of the bounds of the visible, as if this row of shops really did extend beyond the canvas.

From 1930 on, Hopper spent almost every summer in South Truro on Cape Cod. He painted the simple buildings, the roads, and the natural forms of the landscape. He loved the sunlight on the Cape, where the summer light is especially intense. In works such as *Cobb's Barns, South Truro* of about 1931 (Fig. 5), he depicted the buildings casting emphatic shadows, which add visual drama to the setting.

When Hopper found himself restless and unable to paint, he would go to the movies or to the theater as an escape. It is not surprising, then, that he sometimes chose theaters as subject matter for his paintings (Fig. 6). And in creating compositions of other themes as well, he was often influenced by set design, stage lighting, and cinematic devices such as cropping and unusual angles of vision.

Another means of escape for Hopper was travel. He and his wife Jo visited Mexico several times and they traveled in New England, the South, and the far West, often painting watercolors as they went (Fig. 7). Along



Fig. 6. Drawing for painting, *First Row Orchestra*, 1951. Conté on paper, 17 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 20 $\frac{7}{16}$ inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.841



Fig. 8. Drawing for painting, *Hotel by a Railroad*, 1952. Conté on paper, 12 x 19 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.427

Fig. 7. *Jo in Wyoming*, July 1946. Watercolor on paper, 13 $\frac{15}{16}$ x 20 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Bequest of Josephine N. Hopper. 70.1159

the way, Hopper became preoccupied with the psychology and environment of travelers—on highways, in hotels, motels, trains, and gas stations (Figs. 8, 9). He found a group of settings and moods which offered many expressive possibilities and resulted in some of his most poignant paintings.

Hopper was in no sense a narrative painter and had long since transcended his own early work in illustration. While his watercolors were painted directly on the scene as pictorial records of what he saw, his oil paintings were much more than mere representations of reality. They are



Fig. 9. *Gas*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 26 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Mrs. Simon
Guggenheim Fund.

paintings which do not intend to be just descriptive or topical, but aspire to the universal. By refusing to be narrative and aiming only at suggestive symbolic content, Hopper at his best created paintings which express the psychological pulse of their time and yet speak for all time.

Gail Levin
Associate Curator, Hopper Collection
Whitney Museum of American Art

Edward Hopper Publications

Books

Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist by Gail Levin. 8½ x 11". 320 pages; over 500 illustrations, 280 in color. Published by W. W. Norton & Co. in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Clothbound \$29.95 until December 31, 1980; \$35.00 after January 1, 1981; Paperbound \$17.00

Edward Hopper as Illustrator by Gail Levin. 8½ x 11". 274 pages; 635 illustrations, 85 in color. Published by W. W. Norton & Co. in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Clothbound \$25; Paperbound \$12.50

Edward Hopper: The Complete Prints by Gail Levin, 8½ x 11". 128 pages; 162 black-and-white illustrations. Published by W. W. Norton & Co. in association with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Clothbound \$15; Paperbound \$7.50

Poster

Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist. Full-color reproduction of *Early Sunday Morning*. 31 x 39½". \$10.00

Slide Set

Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist. 12 color slides of major paintings in the exhibition. \$9.00

These publications are available by mail from the Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021. Please add postage and handling of \$2.50 for each poster, \$1.50 per book and 75¢ for a slide set, plus tax where applicable.

Itinerary

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

September 23, 1980 to January 18, 1981

Hayward Gallery, London, England

(under the auspices of the Arts Council of Great Britain)

February 11 to March 29, 1981

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

April 22 to June 17, 1981

Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, West Germany

July 10 to September 6, 1981

The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago

October 3 to November 29, 1981

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco

December 16, 1981 to February 14, 1982

This exhibition was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and is sponsored by Philip Morris Incorporated and the National Endowment for the Arts.